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Abstract

When fcllcw-through kindergarten and first-grade pupils in four school systems acrcss the United States were enccuraged tc pick their cwn key vccabulary wcrds as recommended by the Sylvia Ashton-Warner method and to apply the wcrds tc the language experience method of learning reading, the lists the children requested differed significantly frcm the vccabulary intrcduced in the basal readers being used in the schools. Located in Arkansas, Flcrida, Pennsylvania, and Washingtcn state, the schools had adopted texts frcm different publishers. In three of the schools 50 percent cr mcre cf the subjects were black, and the children in the fcurth location included mixed races from migrant wcrkers' families. In only one school were the words chosen by the children significantly related to the basal vocabulary; the pupil-selected vccabulary in one schccl correlated significantly to those in two cther schools, and a significant correlaticn was fcund between vocabularies of all fcur of the basal texts. The use of the Ashton-Warner methcd resulted in enthusiastic reports frcm several teachers that their pupils "were writing their cwn experience stories much earlier than children in previous years." References are cited. (BT)

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SYLVIA ASHTON-WARNER'S METHODS TRIED IN 4 U.S. CITIES

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When the findings of the 1964-65 First-Grade Studies were presented, the search for a panacea approach to beginning reading instruction became somewhat less feverish. Bond, who directed these studies and summarized their findings concluded that there is no one method that is so outstanding that it should be used to the exclusion of the others. Recently, Jeanne Challe indicated in her book that a sufficient body of research provides evidence that a synthetic or phonic approach in beginning reading will yield better long range results. It is interesting that Bond and Challe apparently differ in their conclusions about beginning reading methodology. It seems that the discussion regarding the most effective method to use in beginning reading instruction, has not yet been satisfactorily concluded.

When we turn to the task of selecting a highly effective method for teaching the disadvantaged child to read, the problem is even more complex, and farther from solution, because of the general language deficiency of this group of children. Because no decisive or better method for the disadvantaged has been discovered, a number of kindergarten and first grade teachers were encouraged to institute a language skills and reading program using the methods reported by Sylvia Ashton-Warner in her book, Teacher. The study reported here has resulted from their efforts.

Bond, Guy. "First Grade Reading Studies: An Overview." Elementary English. XLIII, May, 1966. No. 5, p. 468.

Challe, Jeanne, Learning to Read: The Great Debate. McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York, 1967.

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THE NATURE OF THE PROJECT OR DESIGN OF STUDY

A number of teachers are currently using the interesting and meaningful methods discussed by Sylvia Ashton-Warner in her book, Teacher. Ashton-Warner had the young children come in each morning and individually tell her what word they wanted to learn that day. The word is written down on a 5" x 12" card and the child is asked to trace the word with his fingers and to say the word as he is tracing it. He then returns to his place and reviews with a friend the words each has on his cards. Later in the morning the children have an opportunity to write their words on the chalkboard and read them to their neighbor. Ashton-Warner calls the vocabulary the "key" or "organic" vocabulary since the words come out of the child and are key words in his life. These words express the feelings and meanings he has about his world.

When the child has developed a sight vocabulary of some 40 words, he is encouraged to write a story each day about something which interests him. Even before he has mastered 40 words some teachers allow the children to dictate short stories which they write in large print on the child's paper or cards. The child and the teacher then read these stories together.

The method is in essence a language experience approach for developing speaking, listening, reading, writing, spelling and usage skills, with the addition of a combined kinesthetic or tracing, and visual-motor method for developing a sight vocabulary. Major stress

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Ashton-Warner, Sylvia, Teacher. Simon and Schuster, Inc., 630 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10020.

is placed on (the child's discussion and writing of) his own real and imaginary experiences. The curriculum is designed to involve the pupils in active exploration of the natural world so that they will gain an additional fund of ideas, and information to discuss, write and then read about. The phase of the research reported here was concerned with comparing the "key" vocabulary or vocabulary which children ask for, with the vocabulary found in the pre-primers and primers of the basal reading series currently in use in the child's school system. The questions that were investigated are:

1. Is there a significant difference in the words children ask to learn in the Sylvia Ashton-Warner approach and the words presented in pre-primers and primers of basal reading series used in their school systems?
2. Is there a difference in the words requested by children in four cities in different geographic areas of the United States?
3. Is there a difference in the basic vocabulary presented in the pre-primers and primers for basal reading series?

The Children Involved

The children participating in this study were Follow-Through kindergarten and first grade pupils in four different school systems across the United States. The schools were located in Arkansas, Florida, Pennsylvania and Washington. The Follow-Through model used in these schools was the University of Florida parent-education model, designed and directed by Dr. Ira Gordon.

The children in the five classrooms in Philadelphia were 80% black and 20% white. The white children were of Puerto Rican and Italian descent. In Jacksonville, the children studied were 64% black and 36% white. In Jonesboro, Arkansas, the children were about 50% black and 50% white. In Yakima, Washington, the group contained Negro, Indian and white children from migrant workers' families.

Language Learning

In most classes 30-45 minutes per day were spent developing the key vocabulary by the Ashton-Warner approach. The daily work in developing the key vocabulary helped the students gain a sight vocabulary to use for writing their own experience stories.

A variety of other thought provoking experiences and materials were provided to enhance language development including: story telling and reading, singing, art activities, rhythm bands, sand tables, large building blocks, riding vehicles, such as trucks, wagons and tricycles, housekeeping equipment and furniture, dressup clothes and a science and reading table.

The experiences and materials available for learning provided a "language experience" type curriculum similar to that used by Ashton-Warner in her new Zealand school.

Language skills developed as the children interacted with each other, worked with the equipment and materials and became involved in thinking and expressing their thoughts through speech, writing, singing and art media.

Data Gathering Procedures

The basic data needed for this study were two types of word lists. The first type, the key vocabulary lists, were obtained as a result of the teachers using Sylvia Ashton-Warner's language development methods mentioned earlier.

The teacher asks the child what word or words he wants to learn to read that day. One teacher I have observed in Jacksonville, Florida often says to her 5 year olds, "Think of all the words there are in the world and tell me what word you want to learn today." Her eager charges responded with enthusiastic replies such as: mama, alligator, jury, swing set, fire excape, banana pudding, Hoss, superman, helicopter, dragon, rattlesnake, astronaut, catfish, Batman, ghost, wicked witch, and a host of phrases and brief sentences such as: Thornton is a knucklehead, leopard skin coat, go-go boots, my daddy is sweet, I love Charlie, and my mama is mean and she is a sweetie pot.

Individual differences in language development were immediately apparent. One child in this class requested only 2 words during the first four months of school, whereas another asked for 71 words, many of which were embedded in phrases and sentences.

List of Pre-Primer Words From Basal Readers

The list of words used to compare with the key vocabulary list was taken from the words presented in the pre-primers and primers of the major basal series used in each of the four school systems. For example, in Jacksonville, Florida the Harper-Row series is used as the

basal text; in Philadelphia the Ginn series; in Yakima, Washington the Houghton Mifflin series; and in Jonesboro, Arkansas the Macmillan series. In each school system then, the list of key vocabulary words requested by the children was compared with the words presented in the pre-primers and primers of the basal series used in that system.

Procedures and Findings

The words that the children asked for or the key vocabulary and the basal reader vocabulary words were divided into fourteen categories as follows:

persons' names	animals	furnishings & shelter	verbs
fear	favorite characters or heroes	color	other common nouns
sex	food	number	
locomotion	clothing	structure words	

The percentage of words in each of these categories was computed from the total words asked for in the particular city, and the percentage of words in each category from the basal series was also computed. The percentages for each category were placed in rank order and the Spearman R. correlation coefficient was obtained between the key or asked for vocabulary and the basal reader vocabulary for each city. The correlations are reported in Table I.

TABLE I

Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient for Asked for Words and Basal Reader Vocabulary for Four Cities.

City	Spearman Rank
Philadelphia	+ 0.158
Jonesboro	+ 0.080
Yakima	- 0.040
Jacksonville	+ 0.677**

A positive correlation of 0.677 significant at the 1% level was found for the asked for words and the basal reader words in Jacksonville, Florida, as indicated in Table I, which indicates that only in the Jacksonville school was there a similarity between the words the pupils asked for and the words in their basal readers.

When the percentage of "asked for" words in the various categories from the four cities were correlated there was a significant correlation at the 1% level between the Philadelphia and Jonesboro words, that is .835; and between the Jonesboro and Yakima words 0.690 as seen in Table 2. In general , however, the data suggest that the words children asked for in the various cities were different.

Spearman Rank Correlation of Percentages in 14 Word Categories Between the Four Cities

Cities	Spearman Rank
Philadelphia and Jacksonville	0.121
Philadelphia and Jonesboro	0.835**
Philadelphia and Yakima	0.353
Jacksonville and Jonesboro	0.444
Jacksonville and Yakima	0.165
Jonesboro and Yakima	0.690**

The percentages of words in the various categories for basal readers were also correlated with the findings reported in Table 3. All of these basal reader vocabulary lists were significantly correlated at least at the 5% level and three combinations were significant at the 1% level indicating a relatively similar vocabulary among the basal reading series used in these cities.

Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficients for the Percentages of 14 Word Categories Between Basal Readers

Basal Readers	Spearman Rank
Ginn - Harper	0.557*
Ginn - Houghton-Mifflin	0.606*
Ginn - Macmillan	0.492*
Harper - Houghton-Mifflin	0.954**
Harper - Macmillan	0.952**
Houghton - Mifflin-Macmillan	0.987**

* Significant at 5% level

** Significant at 1% level

Teacher and Pupil Response

The author visited the classrooms and talked with both children and teachers. The teachers reported their surprise and delight at the way their pupils had been interested in learning the key vocabulary and later in using it to do their creative writing. Several teachers volunteered that their pupils were writing their own experience stories much earlier than children in previous years who had not followed the Ashton-Warner "key vocabulary" approach. These were worthwhile concomitant findings.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusions

1. In three out of the four school systems the number of words the pupils asked for in the 14 categories had little or no relationship to the number of words presented in those categories by the basal readers.
2. There was a high correlation between the amount of the various types of words selected by the pupils in Philadelphia and Jonesboro and in Jonesboro and Yakima.
3. The vocabularies presented in the pre-primers and primers of these four basal readers are very similar; and the percentage of words in the 14 categories has a high correlation among the 4 series of readers.

Implications

The "key vocabulary" or words children ask to learn, tends to differ significantly from the vocabulary introduced in the popular basal readers. It seems reasonable, therefore, that the children's own key vocabulary is more meaningful than the basal reader vocabulary. Thus, it may be easier for some children to use their own "key words" elicited by the Sylvia Ashton-Warner approach in learning to read, spell and express their thoughts in writing.

Teachers of disadvantaged as well as advantaged pupils are encouraged to try the Ashton-Warner methods since they involve the child in using his own meaningful language experiences as the basis for skill development.